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Books from Overseas

CHICAGO
MERRIE ENGLAND

[Hard times provide an exhilarating stimulus to reformers of all kinds; and Professor Ausubel's study shows what was achieved in a period of Victorian depression before a change in the business cycle and the Boer War turned attention elsewhere.]

'Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* (1894) achieved the fame of which writer-reformers dreamed. *Merrie England*, unlike *Progress and Poverty* and *In Darkest England*, received relatively little attention in the press, and Blatchford . . . was bitter about what he regarded as a conspiracy on the part of newspapers and magazines to ignore his work. Even so, *Merrie England* quickly reached a mass audience, a good fortune not enjoyed by some other recent socialist books, for example, *The Fabian Essays* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. In the words of a circular advertising Blatchford's masterpiece:

'This Book is intended to explain in a simple and interesting manner the reasons why the many are poor, the way in which they can escape from poverty, and the reasons why they should try to receive a better state of things for themselves and their children.

'It explains Socialism and answers all the chief arguments commonly used against Socialism. It deals in a plain way with poverty and drink, the factory system, capital and labour, property and land.

'It shows why England ought to grow her own wheat, and shows how she could do it.

'It is the very book a working man can read and should read. It explains and clears up in a series of short and easy essays nearly all the questions which seem so hard and so dry to the average reader.

'It is easy to read and easy to understand, and has already enlightened many readers who have perused it in the columns of *The Clarion*.

'It was designed for purposes of popular education, and promises thoroughly to fulfil the purpose.

'The advertisement did not lie. No doubt about it, *Merrie England* is a joy to read. But this is not to say that it was a joy to write. For, like Ruskin, Blatchford derived little pleasure from his pieces on social questions. "Work of the 'Merrie England' kind is laborious and painful and gives me no personal satisfaction," he confided to a friend. . . . In short, Blatchford was a frustrated literary man who could hardly control his passion to write artistic pieces. Like William Morris, however, he felt that art could not flourish in a society in which poverty abounded, and so,

however reluctantly, he played the part of a recruiting officer for socialism. A letter he wrote to A. M. Thompson, the co-editor of *The Clarion*, is especially revealing:

A week or two since the yearning for artistic work had got so strong a hold on me I felt like giving in and letting the other work alone. And then I was in Manchester drinking in the Exchange and there came a little match girl, and I looked at her and saw the pretty child face and sweet feminine soul of the baby already half deformed and the flame of rage, that such a sight always lights in me, began to burn and I felt like a traitor who had gone over to the flesh pots and left the tiny ones to be trodden down and savaged by the Ghouls.

'George Gissing often complained about his inability to make his moral indignation marketable, but Blatchford had no such trouble. For life without indignation was impossible for him. In a remarkable piece of self-analysis, he confided to a friend: "I used to think that it was because I had been hungry and sickly and unhappy as a boy that I was impelled to fight for justice and toleration. But perhaps if I had been a duke I should have been a Socialist and a rebel. We must be born so." Indeed, when Blatchford joked that by not becoming a clergyman he deprived the church of a fine parson, he did not exaggerate. His sincerity, his idealism, his Carlylesque hatred of cant and sham, his profound sympathy for the poor, his wariness of Shavian brilliance and straining for effect, and his love of simple and strong language—all helped to account for the success of the masterpiece that took him, he estimated, a month to write.

'The reception of *Merrie England* also owed much to the support of a number of prominent labor leaders. As Blatchford told John Burns in June, 1894: "I have written a book called 'Merrie England,' which is making converts wholesale. I mean to get out a popular edition, at cost price, and I want it spread all over England. You can do a great deal. Will you do it?" Burns and other socialists helped, and so did the ubiquitous Stead. Pointing out in December, 1894, that he had made *Merrie England* the book-of-the-month selection for the *Review of Reviews*, Stead explained: "It is a phenomenal 1d. socialist manifesto of which 700,000 copies have been sold, they expect to reach a million by the new year, and the size of the book and the shape of it, and the cheapness of it, and its extraordinary circulation, demand attention." By the early twentieth century Blatchford estimated that the book had sold nearly two million copies in England and the United States, and that it had been translated into eight languages.'

From IN HARD TIMES: REFORMERS AMONG THE GREAT VICTORIANS. By Herman Ausubel. (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (42s. net.)

'WE HAVE NO CHOICE'

[*Mr. Halpern's authoritative survey of the creation of Israel, and of the first decades of its history, explores the history of Zionist thought, the Palestine negotiations, and the urgent Israeli-Arab situation.*]

'IT was noted as a mark of confidence in its leaders that the Israeli public accepted quietly the final decision to withdraw from Sinai and from the Gaza strip. The obvious implication is that the Israeli public was believed ready to face the imposition of sanctions which would have threatened the shaky Israeli economy with collapse and confronted the Israeli public with an austerity régime that might bring the whole country as close to the starvation level as Jerusalem had been during the siege of 1948. The policy the Israel government followed, until a compromise between its own position and the position of leading UN powers broke the crisis at the last minute, was possible only because it could count on the solid support of the Israelian consensus. The people were ready to back the government to the point of all-or-nothing risks in which Israel would withstand not only the Arab and Moslem world, or the ruthless Soviet bloc, but even the invocation of extreme sanctions against it by Western powers through the UN—closing a circle of world-wide hostility to the Jewish state.

'The character of the Jewish state and the way in which it conceives its own sovereignty today must be understood in the light of the position taken by Israel in that crisis. The idea of a Jewish state, as we have seen, was susceptible to all kinds of restrictions, modifications, or deferments of sovereignty so long as the central purpose and myth image of auto-emancipation was served, or at least not blocked by them. But to seek to impose such restrictions as would deny this central purpose provoked a resistance, and an insistence on the prerogatives of sovereignty, which was as fierce as it was determined.

'In the exercise of its sovereignty in the face of such challenges, Israel was prepared to risk all extremities and to stake its very existence on an all-or-nothing choice. Israel, moreover, was quite self-conscious about its own willingness to resist to the uttermost extreme. It considered this not merely a last resort to which it might be driven, but an effective weapon which might be used by policy. Such an attitude is not unexampled, of course, for countries like Japan or Russia have also considered it a calculable strategic or tactical advantage that the kind of morale, or the kind of objective circumstances, were to be found on their side which would make their people risk more or endure more than would the enemy. The

Israeli version of this doctrine—almost a military principle—is the maxim *Ein breira*: “We have no choice.” Israel is conceived as the last stand of the Jewish people, for the Hitler era had shown they had no safety they could rely on elsewhere. The Hitler era had also taught the Jews the lesson that survival can be bought in some situations only by seemingly suicidal resistance. And while the Jewish state arose out of rebellion against the Jewish situation in the Diaspora, the prospect of having to resist, even in Israel, an entire world made the Israelis see the continuity of their own situation and their own tactics with those of the Exile. In a formula used repeatedly at the time of the Sinai campaign, Mrs. Meir, Israel’s Foreign Secretary, said that the Jews had survived in the Exile by asserting their will to survive even when it was denied by all others; and, if necessary, they would survive as a sovereign state in Israel by asserting their sovereign existence even when it was denied by all others.

‘To live by such desperate expedients is, of course, not a positive ideal possible for any people. For a small and relatively weak nation like Israel, it is a reliable tactical model only on condition that it is not opposed by a great power capable of acting with utter ruthlessness. The suicidal determination of Israel could serve them against the Arabs only because, given Arab weakness, it made them the stronger party. It could not serve them in the same way against Russia, as they are fully aware.’

From THE IDEA OF THE JEWISH STATE. By Benjamin Halpern. (HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (48s. net.)

ILLNESS IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES

[*Healing in primitive societies, miracle cures, religious revivalism, Communist thought-reform, the ‘placebo’ effect in medical practice, and experimental work on the transmission of personal influence are all considered by Dr. Jerome D. Frank in his study of the major forms of contemporary psychotherapy.]*

‘THE world-views of primitive societies regard illness as a misfortune involving the entire person, with direct consequences on his relationships with the spirit world and with other members of his group. Although they recognize different kinds of illness, their classifications often bear no relation to those of Western medicine. In particular, they may not distinguish sharply between mental and bodily illness, or between that due to natural and supernatural causes.

‘Illnesses tend to be viewed as symbolic expressions of internal conflicts or of disturbed relationships to others, or both. Thus they may be attri-

buted to soul loss, possession by an evil spirit, the magical insertion of a harmful body by a sorcerer, or the machinations of offended or malicious ancestral ghosts. It is usually assumed that the patient laid himself open to these calamities through some witting or unwitting transgression against the supernatural world, or through incurring the enmity of a sorcerer or someone who has employed a sorcerer to wreak revenge. The transgression need not have been committed by the patient himself. He may fall ill through the sin of a kinsman.

'Although many societies recognize that certain illnesses have natural causes, this does not preclude the simultaneous role of supernatural ones. A broken leg may be recognized as caused by a fall from a tree, but the cause of the fall may have been an evil thought or a witch's curse.'

'Because of their high mortality rates, diseases in primitive tribes represent a greater threat to the patient than they do in countries with highly developed means of treatment. The longer the illness lasts, the greater the threat becomes. In societies subsisting on a marginal level, illness is a threat to the group as well as to the invalid. It prevents his making his full contribution to the group's support and diverts the energies of those who must look after him from group purposes. Therefore, it seems likely that every illness has overtones of anxiety, despair, and similar emotions, mounting as cure is delayed. That is, persons for whom healing rituals are performed, probably are experiencing emotions which aggravate their distress and disability, whatever their underlying pathological condition may be.'

'The invalid, then, is in conflict within himself and out of harmony with his group. They are faced with the choice of abandoning him to his fate by completing the process of extrusion, or of making strenuous efforts to heal him, thereby restoring him to useful membership in his community.'

From PERSUASION AND HEALING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PSYCHOTHERAPY. By Jerome D. Frank. (THE JOHNS HOPKINS PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (40s. net.)

THE 'MONA LISA'

[It is sixty years since anything comparable to Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence 1475-1521 has been published. Professor Freedberg's text is accompanied by 700 photographs, in themselves a noble history of the painting of the period.]

'FOR Michelangelo the portrait is an inconceivable vehicle, but for Leonardo, whose processes of thought were differently involved with the

experience of nature, it was the form of one of his most remarkable creative acts. The given datum of the *Mona Lisa* (Paris, Louvre; c. 1503–06) is an ineffaceable specific human actuality, but not, according to Leonardo's doctrine, an unalterable one. He has worked upon the form and content of the sitter with subtle pressures that reshape them, gently but ineluctably, toward his own artistic ends. The result is a rare miracle of synthesis between art and actuality: an image in which a breathing instant and a composure for all time are held in suspension. It is the very sharpness of the instant, however, which symptomizes a quality in Leonardo's mind which binds his art more than it does that of Michelangelo, and links it, in one vital respect, more closely to the tradition of the Quattrocento. The vibrant acuity of feeling—the core around which the *Mona Lisa*'s harmony of spirit is composed—is an indication of the survival, in Leonardo, of the almost poignant sense of the identity of individual phenomena that comes from his education in the Quattrocento. This sense is evident not only in the personality but in certain of the descriptive details of *Mona Lisa*'s form, and above all in the exquisite finesses of painting of the textures both of substance and of air. All these remain perfectly contained within the discipline of larger form, and their complementary play within it and against it is only further proof of the suspension in a harmony that Leonardo has achieved. Yet by the attachment to the special and even intimate identity of things as well as feelings, the level of generalization in this picture is constrained, and the ideal in it remains more nearly nature-bound.

'This character is more likely to appear within a portrait, but something of it may have been in others of Leonardo's pictures of this phase as well. We must remember of Leonardo's works done in Florence, since the *Adoration* and up to this time, that not one of his paintings or cartoons physically survives: we know them imperfectly, through evidence that consists in effect of diagrams that reproduce their general, but not their specific appearance. In the case of the *Last Supper* in Milan, the process of ruin has created a like situation. Either of the two *St. Anne* cartoons or that for the *Anghiari* may have had something of the effect of surface that we see in the *Mona Lisa*, of a measure of equivocation between precision and generalization. The effect is part of the prodigious vibrancy of harmony in the picture's style, but it is also an indication of an historical limitation in this artist, who otherwise so wonderfully shaped the data of history, as he did of art, to his own will.'

From PAINTING OF THE HIGH RENAISSANCE IN ROME AND FLORENCE 1475–1521. By Sydney J. Freedberg. (HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (£12 net, 2-vol. set boxed.)

‘TRANQUIL CHAOS’

[*Mr. Buckley’s critical biography of Tennyson is the first to make use of the unpublished ‘Tennyson Papers’ entrusted to Harvard by Sir Charles Tennyson.*]

‘SIR ROBERT PEEL was apparently too preoccupied as Prime Minister to concern himself much with literature. Yet it seems odd that, when preparing the civil list of pensions in 1845, he knew nothing at all of Tennyson until a prescribed reading of “Ulysses” convinced him of the poet’s high merit. For by 1845 Tennyson had already acquired a considerable reputation and even some small degree of popularity. Already he was receiving for his approval—though to his great annoyance—books and manuscripts of second-rate verse from British scribblers and far-off hopeful Americans. The sales of his own poetry had begun to justify Moxon’s confidence. And the reviewers, though still admonitory and often captious, were growing year by year more receptive and more respectful. Cambridge, which had been loyal almost from the beginning, was shortly to honor him by requesting a formal ode for the installation of Prince Albert as chancellor of the university. Meanwhile, Oxford, which had been largely indifferent to the earlier volumes, was responding warmly to the 1842 *Poems*, and in 1844 the Decade, the debating club to which Arthur Clough belonged, had discussed with due earnestness “the relative merits of Wordsworth and Tennyson.” Wordsworth for his part . . . declared him “decidedly the first of our living poets”.

‘Carlyle, who cared little for any living poet as such, rather wished that Tennyson would turn his talents to prose. Nonetheless he confessed to feeling in such pieces as “Dora” and “The Two Voices” the “pulse of a real man’s heart. . . . A right valiant, true fighting, victorious heart; strong as a lion’s, yet gentle, loving and full of music.” And it was clearly the man, not the poet, who attracted and held Carlyle’s attention—a singularly unconventional man, a “large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man, . . . dusty, smoky, free and easy; who swims, outwardly and inwardly, with great composure in an articulate element as of tranquil chaos and tobacco-smoke.” Jane Carlyle, who esteemed both the man and his work, agreed that there was indeed “something of the gypsy in his appearance, which for me is perfectly charming.” Without necessarily exploiting his charm, Tennyson all through the 1840’s maintained an air of mild bohemianism, partly because the pose was natural and congenial to him and partly also because it offered a defense against encroachments on his private life.’

From TENNYSON: THE GROWTH OF A POET. By Jerome Hamilton Buckley. (HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (30s. net.)

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